Iran could make nuclear weapon in 6-8 months, says former IAEA deputy

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-could-make-nuclear-weapon-in-6-8-months-says-former-iaea-deputy/>

A former deputy head of the UN’s atomic watchdog said Wednesday that Iran is capable of producing a nuclear bomb in six to eight months.

In an interview with Israel’s Army Radio, Olli Heinonen said that Israel and the Gulf states “have a reason to worry.”

Heinonen said that despite assertions to the contrary by the current leadership of the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency, which he left in 2010, Tehran has not been adhering to the 2015 nuclear deal.

“Iran is actually weaponizing uranium enrichment without making a weapon,” he claimed.

Heinonen currently serves as a fellow for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a right-wing Washington think tank that has been highly critical of the Iran deal, which was initiated by former US president Barack Obama.

He said that according to his personal, “perhaps back-of-the-envelope” calculation, Iran could produce a nuclear weapons in six to eight months, “if they put in their maximum effort.”

Heinonen conversation with Army Radio was a rare interview to Israeli press while he was in the country for a conference hosted by the ISDEF Defense & HLS Expo.

The former UN official also criticized the Trump administration for its decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal in May 2018, suggesting Washington’s aggressive stance toward Tehran could prove counterproductive.

“I think they felt comfortable [with the Trump decision]. They have the enrichment technology and they can create more centrifuges. Probably they [will be] able to withstand a lot of sanctions,” he said.

[Earlier Wednesday](https://www.timesofisrael.com/intel-chief-iran-acting-out-in-response-to-unprecedented-economic-sanctions/), the head of Military Intelligence claimed that the heavy economic sanctions on Iran and their devastating financial ramifications were the driving forces behind attacks linked to the Islamic Republic on petroleum facilities last month and Tehran’s recent decision to step up uranium enrichment.

“Iran is under growing pressure that is forcing it to take actions connected to oil and to its nuclear project — though for now there are no changes to its policies,” Maj Gen. Tamir Hayman said, speaking at the Intelligence Legacy Center conference in Tel Aviv as part of the Israel Defense Expo.

On May 15, Iran announced it was stepping up its uranium enrichment program in response to the United States’ decision the year before to drop out of the 2015 nuclear deal and impose heavy economic sanctions on Iran and the countries and groups that do business with it. Last week, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran was staying within the limitations set by the 2015 nuclear accord, though its stockpiles of low-enriched uranium and heavy water were growing.

Last month, four United Arab Emirate oil tankers were damaged in the Gulf of Oman. The United States and Israel [said Iran was behind the sabotage](https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-blames-iran-for-gulf-tanker-bombings-iraq-rocket-attack/), which Tehran denied. Days later, Houthis in Yemen — a militia that receives significant funding and assistance from Iran — [carried out a number of drone strikes on Saudi Arabian oil facilities](https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-arabia-says-its-oil-infrastructure-attacked-by-drones/).